DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 097 734 CS 500 758

AUTHOR Silverblank, Francine
TITLE Using Communication Models to Analyze Decision-Making in the Developmental Process.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 13p.; Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (59th, Chicago, Illinois, April 15-19, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); *Curriculum Development; *Decision Making; *Information Theory; Models; Organizational Climate; Problem Solving

ABSTRACT

This paper uses two communication models, Goffman's theatrical model and Harris' psychological model, to illustrate the communication process as it occurs in curriculum projects and to analyze the processes by which people influence each other--decision making and nondecision making. It is suggested that viewing such projects from diverse perspectives, such as organizational theory of communication theory, provides additional tools for analyzing and predicting what occurs in the area of curriculum development. (TO)

ED 097734

USING COMMUNICATION MODELS TO ANALYZE DECISION - MAKING IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS[1]

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Francine Silverblank

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

By Francine Silverblank

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The study of the communication process as it applies to curriculum projects can be a useful tool in yielding pertinent insights into what goes on in this complex environment. Although there is a plethora of data about organizational structure and how this affects communication and, hence, decision-making, there is not nearly as much data about the fundamental principles that underlie all communication transactions on which decisions are finally based.

It is this writer's contention that a greater understanding of the developmental process would result if curriculum projects were evaluated in terms of human communication systems. There are a number of appropriate communication models that would serve this purpose and, by way of illustration, two will be discussed in this paper. The selected models were chosen, not because they are the most viable ones, but rather, because they represent two very different perspectives.

For the reader who wants to familiarize himself with the variety of communication models, "Review and

[1]Paper prepared for the American Educational Research Meeting, April 17,1974. Proprietary Material.

CS 500 758

Evaluation of Models" in Christine Nystrom's Toward A Science of Media Ecology: The Formulation of Integrated Conceptual Paradigms for the Study of Human Communication Systems[1] would prove to be worthwhile reading. Professor Nystrom's summaries include general communication models as well as sociological, anthropological, general semantics, linguistics, philosophical and psychological models.

As noted before, this paper will look at two models, specifically, Goffman's theatrical model and Harris's psychological model, and attempt to demonstrate their usefulness in analyzing the curriculum project process.

According to Grobman, the developmental process refers to group "efforts to produce some new kind of curriculum, using experimental tryouts of preliminary materials and collecting feedback from such tryouts to be used for the improvement of the curriculum prior to its release for general distribution."[2]

The conceptualization of this process is represented in Figure 1.

[1]Christine Nystrom, "Toward A Science of Media Ecology: The Formulation of Integrated Conceptual Paradigms for the Study of Human Communication Systems," unpublished dissertation for the PH.D., New York University, 1973, 158-283.

[2]Hulda Grobman, Developmental Curriculum Projects: Decision Points and Processes, F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1970, 4.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

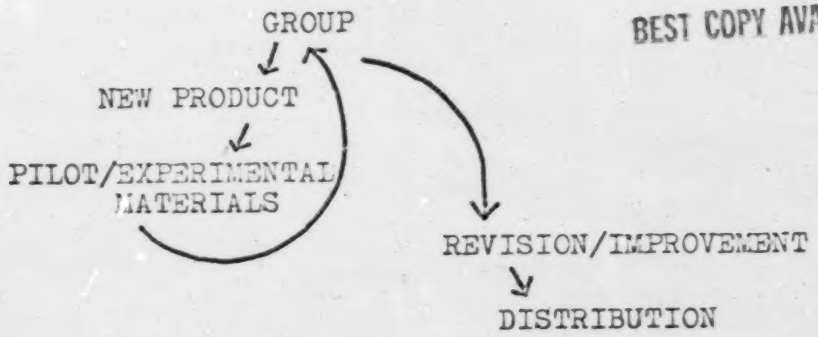

Figure 1

Communication occurs at each decision point and the process is inhibited or enhanced by communication transactions, be they verbal or non-verbal.

It should be noted that some general communication models, such as those of Norbert Wiener[1], Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver[2] would not be germane to the study of developmental curriculum projects because they are essentially concerned with the transmission of information, not the interpretation of meaning of the physical, social, cultural and psychological environments in which communication happens. However, most other models would appropriately apply.

[1]Norbert Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society, New York: Avon Books, 1967.

[2]Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, The Mathematical Theory of Communication, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1949.

By far one of the most interesting models is Goffman's theatrical model[1] of communication, not unfamiliar to students of sociology. In essence, Goffman postulates, like Shakespeare, that "All the worlds's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Though Goffman recognizes the limitations of this model he nevertheless demonstrates its usefulness in analyzing "closed systems," systems that are designed to achieve specific goals.

Goffman's analogy underscores the fact that members of a closed system are cast in particular roles in a prescribed setting and do indeed perform according to the roles assigned them.

To illustrate, with a brief example, let us look at an high school curriculum project team which, from Goffman's stand-point, can be described as a complex performance---a play within a play, within a play, etc. At one level, each team member is performing for the other members---each of whom will be, at different times during the performance, either actor or audience. Simultaneously, other performances are taking place in which the team plays to a larger audience---the principal who is responsible to central administration who, in turn, is responsible to the Board.

[1]Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959.

To return to the performances within the project "play," members of the team will use various techniques to gain support for their ideas---never losing sight of the fact that each one's role has already been defined to some extent by the larger system. For example, financial constraints or a firm deadline might limit the quantity and quality of experimental materials to be produced by the team.

Therefore, members of the project cast enter into a tacitly understood agreement, namely, that the play will be enacted within carefully defined parameters---the situational and administrative constraints. The cast does not dwell on these facts during the performance because they might "discredit, disrupt or make useless the impression that the performance fosters. These facts may be said to provide 'destructive information.'"[1]

For example, during the performance one team member will not let another team member know that he thinks the person is incompetent. Also, he will not let him know that he has already made up his mind not to support any of his ideas. This information may be shared "backstage" without tarnishing the performance but, as Goffman notes, the performance will be discredited if it is revealed "onstage."

On occasion, there is an "informer" in the cast who transmits "backstage" information and "sells out

[1] Ibid, 141.

the show to the audience." "Informers" are rare, however, because few secrets can be kept from a small team and the penalties for informing are usually severe. More common is the "shill" who pretends to be a member of the audience but, in reality, conspires with the cast ---in this illustration, the team member whose ideas are to be rejected.

Goffman's model provides an appropriate language for describing what occurs in curriculum project transactions among the different systems' levels. To understand the various performances of the cast, e.g., the "taking of a cue" or the actor who plays an "out of character role," one must understand the larger system of which the project is only a small part. In short, the project, using Goffman's metaphor, can be likened to a play within a play, within a play, where the actors wear the kinds of "masks" that the roles call for. One actor, for instance, may be cast in two roles; one role requires him to be part of the project cast and the other role requires him to play a part in the performance of the larger organization.

In analyzing curriculum projects Goffman's model might provide useful insights into why certain people can or cannot perform in this "theatre." Certainly, the

model suggests a viable means of examining the intricate network of communication environments and processes that are found in curriculum projects. The model is a particularly useful one because it is based on a systems approach which, by definition, emphasizes that the role of any participant in a performance is dependent on the structure of the whole system, namely, the play; the reverse being also true. In other words, of concern to Goffman is the total setting or environment in which the action takes place.

Less broad in scope is the psychological model popularized by Harris in his best seller, I'm OK---You're OK.[1] This model rests on the assumption that all communication is first and foremost social in nature. A person's communication behavior is based on all his past experiences, the basic patterns of which are established early in life, roughly between the ages of birth and three years.

The almost helpless infant is introduced, within moments of birth

> ....to another human being who picks him up, wraps him in warm

[1] Thomas Harris, I'm OK---You're OK: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis, New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

> coverings, supports him, and begins the comforting act of 'stroking.' ....Stroking, or repetitious bodily contact, is essential to his survival. Without it he will die, if not physically, then psychologically.[1]

Throughout life people need to be stroked---physically in infancy, and symbolically thereafter.

Harris postulates that the child defines himself and others in terms of stroking transactions and, by age two, reaches one of the following conclusions:

I'm NOT OK --- You're OK

I'm NOT OK --- You're NOT OK

I'm OK ---You're NOT OK.

From the normal child's viewpoint, at age two, he's NOT OK, but important "others" are and the child seeks approval from these "others" by behaving in ways that invite stroking. Thus the CHILD (birth to five), in transactional terms, uncritically records internal events, stores the data and develops a <u>felt</u> concept toward life. The PARENT (birth to five), in transactional terms, uncritically records internal events, stores the data and develops a <u>taught</u> concept of life. The ADULT (ten months onward) records data acquired through the exploration and testing of events and develops a <u>thought</u> concept of life. PARENT and CHILD store data unedited, but the

[1] <u>Ibid</u>. 41.

ADULT processes data and rejects what is inappropropriate and not useful. PARENT and CHILD are always operative throughout life; but if the child is consistently stroked for ADULT behavior, he becomes a self-directing and autonomous person and consciously arrives at the decision that I'm OK---You're OK. The adult who has not moved into an I'm OK position is constantly dependent on others for the stroking needed to relieve his NOT OK feelings and adopts an appropriate life script to fulfill this need. Either 1) the script calls for CHILD behavior so irritating that others are forced to be attentive and provide him with strokes, oftentimes negative, or 2) the script calls for PARENT directed behavior---YOU CAN BE OK, IF...., in which case the person obtains strokes by, for example, being compliant or by following his parents' scripts, e.g., he does what they did.

Thus, for Harris, all human communication is motivated by the desire to be stroked or reassured, and the communication transactions that a person engages in are structured by his life script. It is Harris's contention that communication transactions can be analyzed by examining the stroking process.

This model can be productively applied in evaluating

project personnel and personnel policies in terms of both intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. It is certainly a worthwhile effort if one concedes that project personnel affect the outcome of any project undertaking. Indeed, one can safely say that the people involved in a project determine in large measure its success or failure.

If, for example, the director of a project has a PARENT life script, the climate of the project will reflect this and more than likely will drive away people who operate under an ADULT life script---people who are self-directing and autonomous. Such a situation would be especially critical in the developmental process if the ADULT is a skilled classroom teacher familiar with the target population and the PARENT is a college professor who has a thorough knowledge of his discipline but little experience with the target population. The situation would be further complicated by the relationship that the director has with the parent organization.

Using the same brief example, let me illustrate with a simple transaction. In developing curriculum materials the ADULT, who is a skilled classroom teacher, favors materials that do not require a well-trained teacher in the subject-area---he wants the curriculum

to carry itself. The PARENT, who is a college professor and the director, wants the materials to imply a strong teacher background in the subject. To receive the stroking he needs, the director might well compromise on this point and agree to a middle-of-the-road solution unless the sponsoring agency tended toward his way of thinking. This being the case, the director's evaluative decisions regarding process or strategy would be based on receiving approval from his immediate superiors. Under these circumstances, it would not be likely that the director would consider altering his views and, more than likely, would not attempt to gain support for the classroom teacher's ideas.

In short, choices must be made and the choices, all too often, depend on the relationships among staff members and, to a greater or lesser degree, between the staff and the sponsoring institution.

For two people to communicate effectively, their life scripts have to be complementary otherwise communication breaks down or is suspended until accommodation takes place. When three or more people are involved in uncomplementary transactions, communication becomes even more complex.

Thus, using this model, it might be feasible to analyze, explain and predict the outcome of interpersonal transactions---transactions on which the success or failure of a project rests.

At this point, it might be worth noting that some researchers[1] are using computers to help students systematically analyze the criteria for and patterns of their decisions. For example, the student is presented with a problem situation and, by interacting with a computer, can raise questions that he considers pertinent in order for him to arrive at a solution. The computer feeds the student answers that reflect a variety of viewpoints and, when the student has all the information he wants, he arrives at a solution to the problem---in short, he makes a decision.

Because the computer has the ability to process symbols with great rapidity, store and retrieve them later, and do so with reliability and accuracy, the student can immediately receive feedback which could include the identification of other possible solutions, patterns of thinking, steps taken in the analysis, possible consequences of the chosen action, etc.

Research of this nature might prove useful in helping students to identify their own life script and the life scripts of others.

[1]Donald Payne, Associate Professor of Educational Technology, New York University.

Summarily, this paper has suggested, using two specific illustrations, that the study of the communication process as it occurs in curriculum projects would yield useful knowledge about the processes by which people influence each other---decision-making and non decision-making--- which in essence, is the heart of the matter in any curriculum project. It has further been suggested that such study would be productive because communication transactions could be examined in the environments that give the transactions meaning. For example, might one not be better able to determine the degree to which the conflict between verbal and non-verbal messages affect decision-making? Or, how role ambiguities affect project development? The supra-system? The effect of unconscious assumptions that people hold which result in dissimilar perceptions?

It seems to this writer that the study of communication transactions, using a variety of appropriate communication models, could be validly and productively applied to curriculum projects. Certainly, viewing projects from diverse perspectives, e.g., organizational theory, communication theory, the

disciplines, etc., has much to commend it for it affords additional tools for analyzing and predicting what occurs in the critical area of curriculum development. What is needed is more diversity in examining this process. As John Platt so aptly put it, "More diversity in our science, our patterns of living, and our education would enrich us all."[1]

[1]John Platt, Perception and Change:Projections for Survival, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1970, 3.